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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000147

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SUBJECT: CODEL BAYH/CLINTON/MCHUGH MEETS WITH IRAQI LEADERS

Classified By: Ambassador Khalilzad for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On January 13, 2007 Senator Bayh (D-IN), Senator Clinton (D-NY) and Representative McHugh (R-NY 23) met with the Iraqi government leadership over lunch, and then held separate meetings with Prime Minister Al-Maliki and Vice President Abdul Mehdi. Many of the CODEL's questions focused on the new Baghdad security plan, with Iraqi leaders emphasizing that this time Iraqi forces will be in the lead. CODEL members voiced support for Iraq but pointedly added that the GOI needs to demonstrate results soon. End Summary.

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Lunch with Iraqi Leaders  
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¶2. (C) CODEL Bayh attended a lunch meeting with Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, National Security Advisor (NSA) Mowaffak al-Rubaie, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hoshyar Zebari, and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Rafi al-Asawi. Speaker Mashhadani told Codel Bayh the GOI was focused on restoring the strength of the state, bringing its citizens into the political process, and moving forward with national reconciliation. He characterized the American presence as vital to both Iraqi security and politics but said solutions should come from the Iraqis, with support and assistance from the Coalition. Mashhadani said that with Iraqis vice Americans in the lead, the GOI can show the Iraqi people that they are capable of rebuilding the Iraqi state and that the Coalition presence is friendly and beneficial. Mashhadani said he considered the CoR as representing all components of Iraqi society and the only institution capable of making decisions without pressure from outside parties such as the Coalition.

¶3. (C) NSA Rubaie asked Codel Bayh for patience, saying that 2003 represented a paradigm shift for Iraq and the change would take a long time to settle in the region. He described the new Baghdad Security Plan as completely and radically different because the Iraqis were in the lead, and Coalition forces were playing supporting roles in logistics, intelligence, and airpower. He emphasized that every patrol would contain Iraqi Army, Iraqi Police, and Coalition forces to ensure the forces would act in a nonsectarian manner. In response to a question from Senator Clinton, he said the biggest challenge to success was getting the political parties to speak in one voice.

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Meeting with PM Maliki  
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¶4. (C) Noting the media assembled to cover the CODEL visit, Prime Minister Al-Maliki noted that expanded media was one accomplishment of the Iraqi and U.S. The PM called Iraq "the best democratic system in the region." He noted that

bloodshed was being perpetrated by those who fear democracy, and it is important to also remember what has been accomplished in Iraq.

¶5. (C) Senator Clinton said the U.S. shares the PM's sense of accomplishment and is aware of how much Iraqis have suffered and how much courage they have shown. She congratulated the PM on the steps he had taken to improve Iraqis' lives. The Senator said she was encouraged to see the PM had developed a plan to end violence and asked the PM to explain how it would move forward.

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PM on Security Plan: We Want This Responsibility  
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¶6. (C) The PM called the plan a "continuation of our security plans in the past." He said the plan had already begun and was attacking areas where militias are. In addition to that, what distinguishes this plan is Iraqi command and leadership, which had not been true in previous efforts. Coalition Forces (CF) are in a support role, he added, "but we will take responsibility, do the work and take the casualties. We want this responsibility." The PM said some terrorist and militia leaders had already been detained.

¶7. (C) The PM also highlighted that he had ordered no political interference with military commanders, that all lawbreakers will be dealt with equally regardless of sect, and that there will be no sanctuaries for lawbreakers anywhere in Baghdad. The PM also highlighted the political, economic, services and media committees he had set up to support the plan. Finally, he noted that the plan is an opportunity to build and train Iraqi Security Forces (ISF),

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which would eventually allow U.S. troops to retire to bases and withdraw from Iraq.

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CODEL: The Necessity of Demonstrable Progress  
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¶8. (C) Senator Clinton replied that, for U.S. support to continue, U.S. leaders would have to be able to demonstrate progress along the lines the PM described. Congress wants the plan to succeed. The Senator called the PM's January 6 speech "helpful" in explaining the plan's goals.

¶9. (C) Senator Bayh told the PM that the U.S. public hopes for the plan's success and that it would allow a reduction of the U.S. presence in Iraq. However, Senator Bayh noted, U.S. leaders need to assure the U.S. public that the GOI is serious about progress and would see things through. Bayh asked the PM about his plans and timetables for legislation in hydrocarbons, de-Ba'athification and constitutional review.

¶10. (C) On hydrocarbons, the PM said there is only "one small disagreement" that he expected resolved within days. The GOI would urge the Council of Representatives to act on hydrocarbons, de-Ba'athification and constitutional review. He noted that in a January 6 speech he had opened the door to the return to the army of former officers who had served under Saddam but did not have "blood on their hands," which would help reconciliation.

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PM Iraqi Security Capabilities  
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¶11. (C) Representative McHugh asked whether the PM shared the objective of Iraq taking over security for 17 of Iraq's 18 governorates by November. The PM said the GOI would be prepared to do this before November. Mentioning U.S. casualties, the PM said he wants to reduce them and ease the political pressure on U.S. leaders. In return, Iraq is

asking for authority over security matters and light to medium weapons for the ISF, so that U.S. soldiers can "get off our streets and go home." He predicted that the GOI would be able to build up the ISF sufficiently in three to six months to constitute a viable alternative to U.S. forces.

¶12. (C) Senator Bayh asked whether the PM thought a U.S. troop "surge" is a mistake. No, the PM replied, this will be temporary and accompanied by a surge of Iraqi troops from all over the country. The bulk of the effort will be on Iraqi shoulders; the best support the U.S. could give would be air support. The surge, he said, would actually be the first step toward reducing the U.S. troop presence.

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Iraq's Neighbors  
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¶13. (C) Senator Clinton asked the PM's views on Iraq's neighboring countries. The PM said that one reason for Iraq's tensions with its neighbors is U.S. tensions with them. In addition, neighbors are interfering with Iraq; they "fear Iraqi democracy."

¶14. (C) Senator Clinton inquired whether U.S. engagement with Iran and Syria would be helpful to the PM's plan. The PM replied "for sure," with the caveat that "but this will not end problems between us and other countries." It would be helpful for Iraq for the U.S. to solve its problems with Iraq's neighbors. The most important thing is for Iraq to be able to make independent political decisions. Iraq should be a buffer between Iran and the Arab world, not tilted toward either, which would be bad for the region.

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Meeting with VP Abdul Mehdi  
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¶15. (C) Later that same afternoon, the Ambassador and CODEL Bayh (without Senator Clinton) met with Vice President Abdul Mehdi. Senator Bayh confirmed that "we want to stand with you" but that there was a sense of urgency. "What is a reasonable expectation for a time line showing when things can be done," asked the Senator. Vice President Mehdi opined that "we still think we can succeed," because (1) the Iraqi people are still with us, (2) we have the support of the U.S., and (3) we have a national unity government. He then enumerated the successes to date: a successful transition from dictatorship to democracy, elections, constitutional referendum, and a high rate of participation. Senator Bayh acknowledged that the Iraqi rate of participation in the 2005

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elections was much higher than in the typical U.S. election.

¶16. (C) Vice President Mehdi felt that political progress would be made for two reasons: the execution of Saddam Hussein, which closed a chapter in history and dispelled Ba'athist illusions of return, and the new Baghdad Security Plan. As examples of impending progress, he noted that the constitutional reform committee should be completed in six months, and that a draft investment law was almost finished. He added that with Saddam's execution, de-Ba'athification was now a closed issue.

¶17. (C) Senator Bayh said that "time has not been our friend," and that "the American people hope you will act urgently, in your own best interests." Vice President Mehdi acknowledged the importance of national reconciliation by stating that "when we share power, we tell the Shia that although we are the majority, we still have to respect the rights of others and share the country." With respect to regional affairs, Mehdi observed that many border issues are left over from Saddam's era, and cannot solve themselves in only four years.

¶18. (C) The CODEL did not clear this cable.  
KHALILZAD